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E.O. 12958 DECL: 03/09/2016

TAGS: PGOV PREF PREL NI  
SUBJECT: NATIONAL SECURITY ADVISOR ON NIGERIA'S UNSETTLED STATE

REF: Abuja 566

Classified By: Ambassador John Campbell for Reason(s):  
1.5 (b)

¶1. (S) Summary: During a March 10 call to discuss another issue, National Security Advisor Aliyu Mohammed gave his strongest signal yet that he has become disaffected from President Obasanjo over the Third Term issue. He also linked the Delta hostage crisis and the sectarian rioting in the North to the country's generally unsettled state. He acknowledged that hostage taking is likely to continue.  
End Summary.

¶2. (U) The Ambassador called on the Nigerian National Security Advisor, Gen. Aliyu Mohammed, on March 10. The Regional Affairs Officer accompanied him. There was a short exchange on the current hostage crisis in the Delta and the general state of Nigerian politics.

¶3. (U) The National Security Advisor said that Delta Governor James Ibori has been charged by President Obasanjo with resolving the crisis -- and that there had been no change. The National Security Advisor expressed the hope and expectation that the remaining hostages would be freed soon.

¶4. (S) Turning to national politics, the National Security Advisor said that he had been close to President Obasanjo for more than forty years. He recounted his efforts on behalf of Olusegun Obasanjo when he had been imprisoned by former head of state Sani Abacha. For example, he continued, he had contacted former President Jimmy Carter on Obasanjo's behalf. Despite this, Aliyu Mohammed expressed chagrin and frustration over the large sums of money that had been disbursed to the Delta during President Obasanjo's administration -- N1.25 trillion-- and the fact that there was so little to show for it was a strong argument against a third term.

¶5. (S) The National Security Advisor said that President Obasanjo had been in error when he told UK Foreign Secretary Jack Straw that the Emir of Kano supported a

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third term. When the Ambassador asked him if the President had been indulging in selective hearing, Aliyu Mohammed replied with a parable: it is a good thing for a man to talk to God; but if a man claims that God talks to him, watch out! The National Security Advisor also volunteered the distinction between loyalty to an enduring nation and the more transitory loyalty to a political regime.

¶6. (S) Ambassador's comment: The clear implication of

what Aliyu Mohammed was saying is that he has reached the painful conclusion that his love for Nigeria requires him to break with President Obasanjo, despite forty years of friendship. See also Reftel on my conversation with former Minister of Defense and proverbial kingmaker T.Y. Danjuma the evening of March 9.

¶7. (S) Ambassador's comment, continued: My conversation with Danjuma and Aliyu Mohammed had similarities. Both are fierce Nigerian patriots, and both have been at the center of Nigerian governance for a generation, under both military and civilian forms. Both are pro-American and have been U.S. Mission contacts for many years. Both are extremely rich, and both come from the Biafra generation. They are among the most important of stakeholders in the Nigerian "system." Formerly close to Obasanjo, both oppose the third term and fear that a consequence of it could be violent regime change. Both, however, chose their words carefully, and neither actually predicted it, though they came close. Both linked sectarian rioting in the North and Delta hostage taking to the political uncertainty caused by the Third Term issue and the impending 2007 elections. Both predicted that hostage taking would continue until resolution of the fundamental issue of who is going to rule Nigeria. Both visibly demonstrated anxiety about the future of Nigeria.

¶8. (S) Ambassador's Comment Continued: But, there are also differences between what Danjuma and Aliyu Mohammed said. Danjuma's discussion of a possible military coup was explicit, as is his concern about a split between senior officers and the middle ranks. The seniors, he thinks, would stay with the President; the more junior could mount a bloody coup that could also envelope Obasanjo's senior military allies. By contrast, Aliyu Mohammed (also a retired army general) made no reference to potential splits in the military's ranks. On the other hand, Aliyu Mohammed

was more forthright than Danjuma in his distinction between loyalty to the nation, versus loyalty to Obasanjo.

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